

Two-County Regional Trails Assessment District

Trails - Cal Sta Co
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With its 47 parklands located throughout Alameda and Contra Costa counties, the East Bay Regional Park District provides a public resource remarkable for such a highly urbanized area.

The District is unique in that it offers a spectrum of parkland facilities within an hour's excursion distance for any East Bay resident. There are facilities designed for intensive recreation such as picnicking, swimming, boating and fishing. More remote and scenic regional preserves are left in a natural state for hiking, equestrians, limited bicycling, nature study and wildlife habitat.

The chain that holds these parkland gems together is the District's extensive trail network. There are approximately 1,000 miles of trails within the regional parks, and another 150 miles of trails linking them to each other and the communities they serve.

One of the most extensive in the United States, this trail system is also known for its diversity.

For example, backpackers can follow the Ohlone Wilderness Trail on a strenuous, 29-mile hike through some of the most remote and rugged areas of Alameda County, yet the trail is easily accessible from nearby urban areas.

By contrast, the Contra Costa Canal Regional Trail is a multi-use trail designed for pedestrians, equestrians and bicyclists. It creates a 12-mile "linear park" through residential and commercial areas of highly urbanized central Contra Costa County.

For its thousands of daily users, this and other regional trails provide a safe and convenient link between homes, businesses, parks, schools and other public facilities.

Recreation is not the only use for these trails. They also serve as commuter routes for adults traveling to work and children going to and from school. They provide a people-friendly alternative to dodging automobile traffic on city streets.

The trail system has been developed in cooperation with other agencies to ensure that the Park District's regional network connects to theirs. The District will continue these cooperative efforts to maximize public service while reducing costs.

Trails are the District's most popular facilities. Between hikers, joggers, bicyclists and equestrians, an estimated five million users enjoy the Regional Park trails annually, with the numbers increasing every year.

The District's ultimate goal is to extend the regional trail system to link all of its parks and the communities they serve.

Efforts to achieve this goal received a generous assist in 1988 when voters approved Measure AA,

the District's open space bond measure. The measure provides \$225 million for acquisition and development of parks, trails and open space by local and regional agencies. With funds from Measure AA, the Park District will be able to purchase and develop much-needed additional land for parks and trail corridors, achieving the goals of its current Master Plan.

However, Measure AA does not provide funds for maintenance and operation, only for acquisition and development. So in order to maintain and operate its present and future trail system to the standards of safety and quality that users expect, the District needs to develop a reliable, long-term source of funding.

The need for long-term funding is heightened by the state government's widely publicized continuing budget deficits.

In an effort to make up the deficit, the state has withheld from local agencies millions of dollars in tax revenues.

This financial problem could mean reduction in the quality and level of service the public has come to expect for the regional trails unless an additional source of funding is made available.

The Park District's long-term funding option under consideration is formation of a regional special assessment district. Authorized by state legislation, this type of district is essentially a benefit assessment approach. Since the facilities and services to be provided would benefit parcel owners throughout the region, it is believed appropriate that all of them be equally assessed at a minimum level.

Continued



Bob Walker

The eight-mile Lafayette-Moraga Trail, like many regional trails, is an alternative transportation corridor that also offers recreational opportunities to its users.

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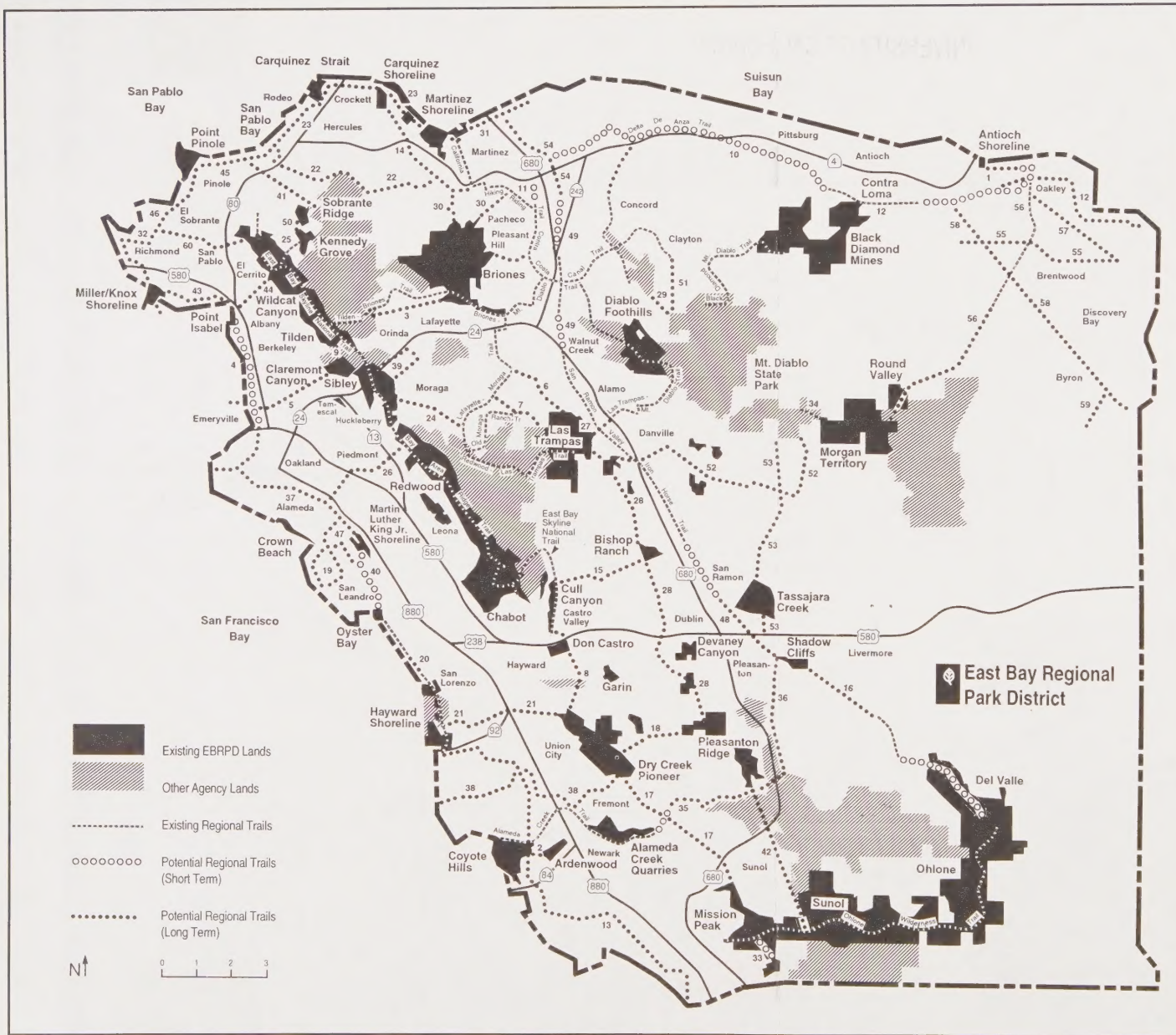
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Regional Trails Benefit Assessment District

Potential Regional Trails

- 1 Antioch Pier to Big Break
- 2 Ardenwood to Coyote Hills
- 3 Black Hills to Lafayette Ridge
- 4 East Bay Shoreline
- 5 East Bay Shoreline to Claremont Canyon
- 6 Bollinger Canyon to Las Trampas (Bollinger Creek)
- 7 Burton Valley to Las Trampas (Las Trampas Creek)
- 8 Chabot to Garin
- 9 Claremont Canyon to Tilden
- 10 Contra Costa Canal (Concord to Antioch)
- 11 Contra Costa Canal to Hwy. 4
- 12 Contra Loma to Marsh Creek
- 13 Coyote Hills to Santa Clara County
- 14 Crockett to Franklin Canyon
- 15 Cull Canyon to Bishop Ranch
- 16 Del Valle to Shadow Cliffs
- 17 Dry Creek Pioneer to Mission Peak
- 18 Dry Creek Pioneer to Pleasanton Ridge
- 19 Harbor Bay Isle Loop
- 20 Hayward Shoreline to Oyster Bay
- 21 Hayward Shoreline to Garin/Dry Creek
- 22 Hercules to Briones
- 23 Hercules to Martinez
- 24 Indian Ridge to Moraga
- 25 Kennedy Grove to Wildcat Canyon
- 26 Lake Merritt to Redwood
- 27 Las Trampas to Mt. Diablo
- 28 Las Trampas to Pleasanton Ridge
- 29 Lime Ridge to Mt. Diablo
- 30 Martinez to Briones
- 31 Martinez Shoreline to Edith Point
- 32 Miller/Knox to Wildcat Marsh
- 33 Mission Peak to Monument Peak
- 34 Morgan Territory to Mt. Diablo
- 35 Niles Canyon (Alameda Creek)
- 36 Niles Canyon to Shadow Cliffs
- 37 Oakland Estuary Shoreline
- 38 Old Alameda Creek
- 39 Orinda Loop (Sibley, Orinda, Tilden)
- 40 Oyster Bay to San Leandro Bay
- 41 Pinole Ridge to Kennedy Grove
- 42 Pleasanton Ridge to Sunol
- 43 Point Isabel to Miller/Knox
- 44 Point Isabel to Wildcat Canyon
- 45 Point Pinole to Hercules
- 46 Richmond Shoreline to Point Pinole
- 47 San Leandro Bay Circumference
- 48 San Ramon to Shadow Cliffs
- 49 San Ramon Valley to Concord
- 50 Sobrante Ridge to Kennedy Grove
- 51 California Hiking and Riding Trail
- 52 Sycamore Valley to Mt. Diablo
- 53 Sycamore Valley to Tassajara Creek
- 54 Walnut Creek Channel to Contra Costa Shoreline
- 55 EBMUD Aqueduct
- 56 Morgan Territory to Big Break
- 57 Santa Fe Railroad
- 58 Southern Pacific Railroad
- 59 California Aqueduct
- 60 Wildcat Creek



Two-County Regional Trails Assessment District

The specific procedure for formation of this type of District is set forth by state legislation. It includes extensive public notification and explanation of what is proposed, a public hearing and ultimately approval by the agency's governing board (in this case, the Park District Board of Directors).

Initial studies indicate that an assessment of \$5.44 per parcel annually would raise an estimated \$3.5 million annually, sufficient to finance maintenance and operation of the Park District's trails at their current high standards. This money must be used exclusively for trail maintenance. It would also ensure a consistent, appropriate level of maintenance and operation for the Measure AA-funded trails, once the trails are in place.

The assessment would not be paid by the Brentwood-Oakley area, where the Park District board established a separate landscape and lighting district in 1991. Nor would it include the Livermore area, because that region joined the District under an annexation agreement that includes a phased tax revenue transfer from the Livermore Area Recreation and Park District. These areas would be included in the landscape and lighting district, but on a zero-assessment basis.

Also, farmers and ranchers who own more than one parcel would be assessed only for the parcel where a residence is located.

Recognizing that an annual \$5.44 assessment could be a hardship for some senior citizens with low

incomes, a 50 percent discount would be provided for seniors whose annual income is below the state-defined poverty level. Also, the proposed program and assessment for the following year would be reviewed annually at a public hearing.

A primary concern of the Park District is that its high standard of public service be sustained and continued. Expected annual increases in the number of parcels would likely provide sufficient revenue to finance the cost of maintaining and operating trails that are added to the system.

As presently envisioned, trail maintenance and operation functions funded by the assessment district would include:

- Regular on-going maintenance of the trail system and various trail-related facilities.
- Preventive maintenance on a scheduled basis.
- Park ranger service, including regular public safety patrol, in order to assure safety and protection of both trail users and adjacent property owners.
- Fire suppression and weed abatement.
- Aesthetic features that would contribute to the overall enjoyment and appreciation of trail users and neighboring property owners.

Each of these services is essential to providing trail users with attractive, well-maintained facilities, while also ensuring proper consideration of the rights and privacy of property owners adjacent to the trails.

The Park District staff has conducted eight public meetings throughout Alameda and Contra Costa counties to explain and discuss the trails assessment district proposal. Meetings were held Jan. 27 in Union City, Jan. 28 in Martinez, Feb. 3 in El Cerrito, Feb. 4 in Rodeo, Feb. 10 in Walnut Creek, Feb. 11 in Oakland, Feb. 17 in Livermore and Feb. 24 in Fremont. An additional meeting will be held in the Antioch area soon.

Participants in these meetings supported the trails program as well as the proposed assessment district by a considerable margin. This favorable response was strongly confirmed by a public opinion survey (see poll results), whose results indicated exceptionally strong support for the District's trails programs.

Meanwhile the Park District Board of Directors has taken the first formal steps towards creation of the District. These consisted of directing the staff to prepare an engineer's report detailing the proposal, authorizing this informational mailing and setting the date for a formal public hearing.

Ultimately, whatever funding mechanism is chosen to meet the public's needs, the purpose is the same—proper maintenance of the District's high-standard, high-service trail system, especially as it expands to meet the increasing recreational and transportation needs of East Bay residents.

The public hearing required as part of the process of establishing a regional trails assessment district is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Thursday, May 27, 1993, in the auditorium of the Joseph P. Bort Metro Center at 101 Eighth Street in Oakland.

Those persons wishing to support or protest the proposed assessment district and \$5.44 per parcel annual assessment can address a letter to the board of directors or can appear in person at the May 27 public meeting.

Letters should be sent to the East Bay Regional Park District Board of Directors, 2950 Peralta Oaks Court, P.O. Box 5381, Oakland, CA 94605-0381.

A protest letter should state that its author is the owner of an affected parcel, give the location of the parcel and state the reason for opposition.

The board of directors vote deciding whether to establish the assessment district must be taken at a subsequent public hearing. That meeting is scheduled for 2 p.m. on Tuesday, June 1, 1993, at the Park District

headquarters at 2950 Peralta Oaks Court in Oakland. Protest letters must be received before the close of that public hearing.

If property owners owning more than 50 percent of the area of assessable lands within the proposed district protest formally in writing by the close of the June 1 hearing, the assessment district cannot be formed.

For more information on the assessment district proposal, phone the East Bay Regional Park District, (510) 635-0138, ext. 4600.



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Public Opinion Poll

As part of its effort to determine the attitude of East Bay residents towards a proposed two-county regional trails assessment district, the East Bay Regional Park District commissioned a public opinion poll, which was conducted by the Strategic Research Institute (SRI) of Lafayette.

SRI conducted telephone interviews with 502 registered voters randomly selected from Alameda and Contra Costa counties. The results showed strong support for a trails assessment. The randomly selected group is considered an excellent indicator of voter views district-wide, with an accuracy range of plus or minus 3.7 percent.

Among other questions, those polled were asked whether they would support or oppose a special benefit assessment of \$5 per year "in order to provide funds to operate and maintain a safe and aesthetically attractive system of trails and related facilities, which would include funds for park ranger services, safety patrols, fire suppression, and weed abatement."

Seventy-seven percent of the respondents expressed support for a \$5 assessment, five percent indicated that

they were unsure, and eighteen percent expressed opposition.

In addition, those who were initially uncertain, or who opposed the proposed \$5 benefit assessment, were given a short list of possible consequences to the trail system if additional funds were not raised for maintenance. The possible consequences included fewer additional trails, reduced maintenance and less security.

Considering these possibilities, four percent of those unsure or opposed changed their minds and said they would support the assessment, increasing overall support to 81 percent.

"Voters are well aware of the valuable public resource that exists in the East Bay regional park and trail system," the SRI pollsters concluded. "Further, voters are willing to preserve and protect this resource. While voters recognize that times are tough and that budgets are tight, they nevertheless, are willing to support the proposed \$5 per year assessment for on-going and preventative maintenance of the regional trails."



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